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DEPARTMENT FOR PM, NEA/MAG, NEA/RA, EUR/RPM AND AF/RSA
EUCOM PLEASE PASS TO AFRICOM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/25/2028

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SUBJECT: MFA POL/MIL CHIEF: AFRICA OPPOSES AFRICOM PRESENCE
ON THE CONTINENT

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas T. Riley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Military Affairs Chief Karim Halim recently criticized U.S. military plans for an AFRICOM presence in Africa, underscoring that the vast majority of African countries considered any U.S. military presence in Africa to be a provocation. While not objecting to the constitution of a regional command, per se, Halim was also critical of AFRICOM's planned sub-regional orientation, calling it a confusing model and inappropriate for the African context and opined that AFRICOM should remain off-continent and emphasize countries, not sub-regional African groups. The Embassy has been receiving an increasingly negative message from the Moroccan MFA on AFRICOM, contrasting with somewhat more positive signals coming from Moroccan military interlocutors of the Embassy's Office of Defense Cooperation. End summary.

Critical of AFRICOM Presence in Africa

¶2. (C) On April 3, 2008, Poloff met with Moroccan MFA Military Affairs Chief Karim Halim to discuss bilateral security issues after Halim's recent participation in the DoD-sponsored African Dialogue conference at Airlie House, Virginia (March 25-28). Reporting directly to MFA Director General Yousef Amrani, Halim is our principal interlocutor on political/military and counterterrorism affairs. Halim said that while Morocco would appreciate the opportunity to participate in future conferences of this sort, he expressed many reservations about the orientation of AFRICOM toward Africa and toward Morocco, in particular. Halim said that no matter how well intentioned AFRICOM may be, its plan for a presence in Africa, however diffused, is "seen by most African countries as a provocation, given the backdrop of the current U.S. military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan."

¶3. (C) Halim considered the perception of AFRICOM intentions in Africa to be very bad among African countries; this perception having been compounded by the high-profile media

coverage of AFRICOM's planned orientation toward Africa. He noted, with irony, that the broad opposition to AFRICOM's planned presence in Africa was the first time in his career that he had ever seen fifty-three African countries agree on anything. He recommended that AFRICOM's presence should remain completely European-based and have military relations handled in a traditional bilateral manner through U.S. Embassies in each country.

Regional Orientation Also Misplaced

14. (C) Halim was also critical of AFRICOM's planned diffused sub-regional orientation, calling it a confusing model and inappropriate for the African context. He said that the overriding orientation of most African countries was to seek better bilateral relations with the U.S. (in this case, within a military context) with little regard, or even disdain, for putting military dialogue within a regional context.

15. (C) Halim considered AFRICOM's orientation toward collective African organizations (e.g., African Union, ECOWAS, and African Maghreb Union) to be misplaced. Halim expressed frustration that AFRICOM appeared to be opening up dialogue with groups like the African Union, a group from which Morocco is excluded. He added that some subregional groupings being contemplated by AFRICOM (such as around Sudan and Nigeria) would not succeed since, in the case of Sudan, there is no military interlocutor with which AFRICOM can deal, and in the case of Nigeria, the military is very small and has a completely different agenda than its neighbors. In sum, Halim opined that AFRICOM should emphasize countries and

not sub-regional or other African groups.

Military Also Cautious But Less Critical

16. (C) In early April, Moroccan COL Mohamed Rafia (Senior Advisor to Chief of Military Logistics Major General Tamdi) told our ODC Chief that Morocco was in a good position to host an AFRICOM element but that given today's global political climate and the negative perception of the current U.S. administration in the Arab world, Morocco would have to wait until after the U.S. presidential election before considering hosting an AFRICOM HQ element or other entity. Although underscoring the extensive and positive military cooperation between the GOM and the United States, Rafia criticized AFRICOM's regional, specifically African Union, focus, adding that the relationship could best be improved if kept in a bilateral orientation.

17. (C) Comment: Although it looks more to the Arab World and even Europe and the United States, Morocco remains deeply engaged in Africa. Halim's views appear to reflect those of his bosses. The Embassy has been receiving an increasingly negative message from the Moroccan MFA over the last year regarding an AFRICOM presence in Africa, contrasting with more positive signals coming from Moroccan military interlocutors of the Embassy's Office of Defense Cooperation.

Among the public, however, AFRICOM's presence is also controversial. Almost any U.S. military activity evokes press coverage raising concerns about AFRICOM possibly establishing a base in Morocco. General Ward may wish to reiterate that AFRICOM will be headquartered in Stuttgart during his next visit to Morocco. End Comment.

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Riley